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To Market! To Market! Why and How

by Nathan Aaron Rosen

Editor's Note: This article is based on a speech presented on April 9, 2003 at "Law Library 2003: Skills, Strategies & Solutions," sponsored by the Practising Law Institute in New York. Janice Henderson and Gitelle Seer were co-chairs. This article also includes materials from the course handbook (G-737), which is available for purchase from PLI at www.pli.edu.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...
We had everything before us, we had nothing before us.

Paraphrasing the idea that Charles Dickens introduced in opening *A Tale of Two Cities*, and with a nod to Winston Churchill, we librarians should ask ourselves whether more people have, ever in history, been working in the information profession. Today's information professionals use more information, spend more money on information, and have more information at their fingertips than ever before. Enormous databases, searchable with sophisticated syntax, let us deliver information anywhere in the world in every way imaginable. But, we also need to ask if we have ever been under more pressure, experienced more cutbacks, and been less valued.

One key way to make yourself really secure in your position and feel that you are fully appreciated for your knowledge, skills, experience, and contribution is to market your expertise. To do that effectively, you must have a concrete marketing plan that you regularly act upon.

In this article, I will show you that in order to market yourself successfully, you need to know and understand three elements: yourself, your organization, and your subject or services.

Why Marketing is Important

Librarians have long overlooked marketing as a critical activity. Only recently have librarians, library organizations, and library schools recognized the pivotal importance of marketing.

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From the Editor...

Again, I find myself apologizing for lateness. We had originally scheduled Linda Will's article for September, but at the last minute pushed it ahead to the July/August issue, which left us with a blank hole for September. Fortunately, Nathan Rosen came to our rescue when he offered us an excellent article on marketing library services. Nathan originally presented these ideas as a part of the PLI "Library Skills 2003" seminar. Feeling strongly that this is an important — and essential — part of a librarian's work, he wanted it to reach a larger audience, and we were happy to oblige. It is full of good ideas about how to work marketing into your everyday activities. If you follow Nathan's advice, we hope you will be secure in your job and secure your library against budget cuts.

In his "Database Report," Steven Anderson tells you about LexisNexis TotalSearch. This is a new knowledge-management product, and LexisNexis has selected a small group of law firms to implement the pilot phase later this year. The final product should be released in early 2004. We will have more coverage of TotalSearch in the coming months. We are waiting to get feedback from its users in order to do a complete report, possibly similar to Linda Will's article on West km.

We cover many new books and services in this issue. In "New Sources," you will find reviews of books about electronic surveillance, using paralegals effectively, and statutory interpretation. Stacey Gordon tells you about a new legal journal, *Legal Affairs*, that she found fascinating and a worthy addition to writing about the law.

We are working hard to get back on schedule, and if we don't make it in October, we will be on track by the end of the year. And, that, can you believe it, is just around the corner.

Donna Tuke Heroy
Editor/Publisher

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Marketing is an essential process. Therefore, we first need to see all of our activities as containing some element of marketing. When you begin to think about marketing, it may require some effort to see everything as marketing and to consider every interaction as a marketing opportunity. June Berger, director of Library Services at New York's Stroock Stroock & Lavan LLP, says, "It is incumbent on all of us to make marketing a never-ending process. Even a casual conversation about the library in the halls or elevator is an occasion for marketing. If you miss these opportunities, you lose a chance to show off your expertise or make someone aware of a service he or she was not aware of."

Marketing library services is not a separate function or activity that is performed by the head librarian or a marketing specialist; it belongs to everyone on the library staff. Jeff Cohan, library director at Carpenter Bennett & Morrissey in Newark, New Jersey, tells us, "Given the state of the economy and the state of our profession, it is now imperative to actively market the value of the library. It must become a way of working and a way of living so that it is going on all the time."

Other leading lights in the library profession have voiced those sentiments. Amelia Kassel of Marketing Base, a California company specializing in industry, company, and competitive and market research since 1984, says, "The wisest librarians know an exceptional secret — marketing is critical to the future of the profession, because it can lead to increased support for libraries and librarians." Many librarians point out that you need to promote yourself, because it is not enough to do a good job. You need to

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reinforce your value to people within the larger organization.

To do this effectively, we must make marketing part of the fabric of our normal day so that it becomes a way of thinking and acting. If we dedicate ourselves to marketing our services, it will make a difference. Many who are successful can readily testify to the value of that investment for success. "The

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key element for all types of marketing is to *persist*," says Sally Reed, director of libraries for the City of Norfolk (Virginia). "Try, and keep on trying," she continues. "Just as a little drop of water can eventually crack a rock, so too our constant efforts to market our expertise can make us successful."

From the foregoing, you can see that marketing libraries is not simply a good idea or good business practice — it is a matter of survival. We ensure this survival with a continuous campaign of developing our message and presenting it repeatedly in many different forms. You can show what you can offer by presenting yourself, your skills, and your services in the best possible light.

How to Market

To most effectively market yourself, you will need to know three things: yourself, your organization, and your subject or services.

Know Yourself: The first key element is to know and understand yourself because self-knowledge is essential to being effective. When you understand your own style, you can be aware of another person's style. This leads you to seeing how you might work with this person effectively. By knowing your strengths and weaknesses, you will be substantially more effective, because you can take advantage of both. Over the years, I have learned my own weaknesses regarding politics, personalities, and personal agendas, and that knowledge has allowed me to better market myself.

It is also helpful to know what others think of you. In addition to the traditional evaluation or the more modern 360-degree performance review, you can learn how you and your services are perceived by conducting regular opinion audits or surveys. For example, I deliver a "Library Services Satisfaction Survey" when I give research results to attorneys. The comments from these surveys have become a useful addition to my annual evaluation.

Know Your Organization: Successful military commanders study the layout of battlefields because each one is different and critical to success in waging their campaigns. For you as a librarian, knowledge of your organization, users or patrons, and fellow employees is key to successfully marketing your expertise.

In recent years, this has become substantially more difficult. Organizations have become larger with multiple locations. The Internet has become the mecca of the uninformed user, and mergers and staff turnover have increased. The task of marketing is thus more complicated, because it has become more difficult to get to know all of your organization well.

Remember that there are many people in your organization who have information needs besides traditional library users, such as lawyers and legal assistants. You need to view the organization as a big, complex puzzle with many pieces. Getting to know the big picture, including staff in all parts of the organization who could benefit from your services, is necessary to identify those you can help. To do this, you must be proactive. Get out and meet people. Take every opportunity to introduce yourself and ask people about their information needs.

To truly understand your organization, it is imperative to be sensitive to the different personalities and behavior patterns that occur throughout the organization. Not everyone in a law firm or legal department is an assertive lawyer who knows exactly what she or he wants. Many of your potential patrons are more passive and may not even recognize that they could benefit from your knowledge and experience. In my current job, I am constantly amazed by the wide variety of information needs I can assist with once I get to know some of the reticent and less articulate people on our staff.

Lucy Lettis, who is director of Business Information Services at Arthur Andersen LLP in New York,

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reiterates this when she points out that information professionals would be doing themselves a service if they figured out what their organization culture is. Nigel Oxbrow, who is a principal at TFPL, a London-based consulting company with offices in London and New York, says, "In order to thrive, information professionals must understand their organization, its strategies, and its challenges. They

need to know where knowledge and information can add value.”

You can begin the process of knowing your organization’s staff by becoming part of new employee orientations. That way you get to know them, their experiences, and their needs from day one. You should also consider conducting exit interviews whenever possible. This is an excellent way to learn how employees view you and your services. It may also open the way for networking and outside consulting opportunities. In my case, a side benefit in a couple of cases, was that the person leaving was going to an organization where there was no librarian. They would occasionally hire me to conduct research, make recommendations about how to organize their files or intranet, or ask me to suggest materials that they might want to have in their new office.

Once you know your organization, you must continually strive to keep up with what is going on in your organization. Like a doctor, you need to listen to the heartbeat. One excellent way to do this is to be involved by serving on various committees and task forces. I can attest that my involvement in various formal and informal committees and task forces has been an extremely valuable technique to get to know my organization, its staff, and what is going on.

Marsha Pront, my previous boss and mentor for more than a dozen years (now at Heller Ehrman), introduced me to the idea that librarians should actively participate on various law firm practice group and firm-wide committees. This is a tremendous opportunity to be seen and known. You will also see your patrons in their natural work environment. In my current job, I have taken this technique one step farther. I regularly attend many of the practice group meetings and many firm committee meetings even though, at first, it seemed unusual for a librarian to attend.

Another way to know your organization is to read what your organization’s staff is reading. This allows you to understand current issues in the profession and anticipate information needs. In addition, read what is being said about your organization and

... see what employees are working on and what is in their in-box to read. Find ways you can help.

what the organization is saying about itself. I have often found this especially useful as it lets me anticipate questions and send e-mail alerts on fast-breaking topics of interest. Other times, I score points by knowing the terminology, cases, and key

activities in areas the attorneys are inquiring about. Nothing amazes patrons more than having the answer on your desk or in your computer, so that they have the information in their e-mail box by the time that they return to their office.

Walk around to see what employees are working on and what is in their in-box to read. Find ways

Not only must you learn what is important to your profession, but you must keep up-to-date.

you can help. Hand delivering research results or even journals that are normally routed can be useful as an occasion to show your face and engage in a marketing opportunity. I actually get a lot of reference questions that way.

Know your subject and services: There is no substitute for knowing your stuff. You must know your subject and the services you provide. It doesn’t matter how much glitter and sparkle you exhibit, you must still have the proper skills and knowledge to back up your marketing. Library associations, such as AALL, ALA, ASIST, and SLA, have recognized this for a long time and have been trying to articulate core competencies for librarians.

Not only must you learn what is important to your profession, but you must keep up-to-date. It is imperative for you to be involved in continuous learning, because knowledge is not static; it must be constantly refreshed and expanded to keep up.

A Marketing Action Checklist

- Make a marketing plan. The plan does not need to be elaborate or even complete at the outset, but you need to start somewhere by planning to take some action. The old saying, “A journey of a million miles begins with one step,” is especially true here. Too often librarians don’t even start because the task looks so enormous, complex, and overwhelming.
- Think about branding. You want to make your name and identity recognizable. I do this with bookmarks and logos. My logo for CLE programs appears on every e-mail announcement, every e-mail confirmation, every e-mail reminder, the sign-in sheet, every handout, the evaluation sheet, and the CLE completion certificate.
- If you don’t already have one, strongly consider establishing an e-mail newsletter in which you provide current information about the library, its acquisitions, and services.
- If for some reason you don’t have a section on your firm’s Intranet, start planning a number of useful pages. Many librarians (including me)

have, and it is a great way to increase your visibility.

- Increase the number and variety of training sessions that you present yourself, or at the very least, where you can introduce the session and speaker. Determine what special topic training sessions you can create. Consider working with your outside vendors to bring in outside experts.
- Conduct open houses. Work with your firm to use the library in a variety of ways to get people in the door. Use these events to show off library services. Have contests with prizes. Lucy Curci-Gonzalez, head librarian at the New York office of Morgan Finnegan, conducted a very successful "name-your-catalog" contest in which the players were asked to suggest a name for the new online catalog.
- Talk to people daily — wherever you are and at all levels of the firm — from the mailroom personnel to the managing partner. Try to understand their jobs and what unarticulated information needs they might have.
- Make a point to be friendly.
- Publicize, in the broadest manner possible, the full array of services you offer or can provide.
- Look for opportunities to speak on something you know or can learn about that other people want to know. I do this with everything from researching legal ethics, to becoming a notary public, to making PowerPoint™ presentations.
- Try to find chances to write articles on something you know or can learn about that other people will find interesting or useful to their work.
- Volunteer for firm and department special task forces, committees, and jobs. The librarian's place is everywhere because of the special training and knowledge that you can bring to nearly any activity within the organization. While a librarian at KMZ Rosenman's New York office, Rochelle Cheifetz, for example, seized the opportunity to expand her role to include conflicts checking. Daniel J. Pelletier, director of Library Services at Kramer Levin in New York, and Steven A. Lastresa, law library and legal records manager at Washington, DC-based Arnold & Porter, did the same with CLE. Other librarians have put their skills to work with associate training or in the file room.

Conclusion

Remember that a company's greatest expense and most significant asset is you. You are the resource that is most volatile, least permanent, hardest to measure, and most valuable. Without staff, most

organizations are nearly worthless. In bankruptcy, physical assets are worth pennies. So it benefits the firm to take full advantage of your knowledge, train-

Remember that a company's greatest expense and most significant asset is you.

ing, and experience. The critical first step is for you to market your expertise.

From this article consider taking as your marching orders the famous words of Ms. Frizzle from the wonderfully educational series, *The Magic School Bus*, "Take chances, make mistakes, get messy!" After reading this article, I hope that you think about knowing yourself, your organization, and your services. I hope you are inspired to make a concrete marketing plan and execute some activities every day. If you make marketing integral to your life, and by making it part of all of your activities, you will be able to feel more secure in your position — and more appreciated. You will have accomplished that with a concrete marketing plan that is acted upon each day.

Then, unlike Charles Dickens, you can say that it was not the worst of times, but it was the best of times.

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Further Reading

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